Another Death Plot?

That conspiratorial army of would-be historians who specialize in the assassination of John Kennedy may have a brand-new plot to play with. In Chicago last week, Legal Researcher Sherman H. Skolnick filed suit in federal district court against the National Archives and Records Service to release certain documents. He contended that the archives had unlawfully squirreled away the details of a hitherto unknown plot or plots to kill J.F.K. at the Nov. 2, 1963, Army–Air Force game in Chicago, 20 days before his assassination by Lee Harvey Oswald.

Quixotic as his quest may sound, Skolnick, who is a paraplegic, is not a man to be taken lightly. He is a well-known courtroom gadfly with a penchant for legal battles, and he played a key role in getting two Illinois Supreme Court judges to resign amid charges of conflict of interest brought by him (TIME, Aug. 29). Thus it was not surprising that people with information about the alleged plot sought him out to help make their case; among the informants is a former Secret Service agent.

As Skolnick tells it, the Chicago assassination plot involved a supposed accomplice of Oswald's by the name of Thomas Arthur Vallee and three or four other men whose identities are uncertain. Their plan to kill the President had to be abandoned when Vallee, a lithographer, was picked up by Chicago police on a minor traffic violation on the day of the game. After spotting a hunting knife on the front seat of his car, the cops looked further and found a rifle. Vallee was put on probation for concealing a weapon; for the traffic violation he drew a $5 fine, which was suspended. He has since disappeared, as has the photograph that should be attached to his arrest card.

Skolnick firmly believes that Oswald was somehow involved in Vallee's alleged plot. In an effort to prove it, he wants to see certain documents that the Warren Commission considered in making its report and then turned over to the archives, where they are to be kept secret for 75 years. Skolnick argues that the archives can prove that the 1962 Ford Falcon driven by Vallee was —as he believes—linked to Oswald in some way or even registered in his name. Skolnick also maintains that the archives have Government documents showing that Klein's Sporting Goods Co. of Chicago had no receipt for the gun allegedly sent to Oswald—an allegation that raises the possibility that the weapon actually came from some other source.

The Justice Department, however, has responded to Skolnick's suit with a "No comment," and National Archivist Marion Johnson claims that he has "seen no evidence in the records connecting Vallee to an assassination attempt." The Government has 60 days in which to answer the suit.

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HARTLAND KLOTZ—CHICAGO DAILY NEWS

SHERMAN SKOLNICK
Only the archives can tell.